

Small Group Guide: Nicodemus and the New Birth

Based on John 3

Before You Meet

Encourage group members to read John 3:1-21 before gathering. **Ask them to come prepared to share one thing that stood out to them from the passage.**

Key Takeaways

- Religious morality, tradition, and rule-keeping cannot produce the new birth. Nicodemus was respected, devout, and educated, and Jesus still told him he must be born again.
 - The new birth is a spiritual birth, distinct from physical birth, brought about by the Holy Spirit when a person repents and places genuine faith in Christ.
 - Saving faith is not merely intellectual agreement with facts about Jesus. It is a *full surrender* of trust.
 - The most pressing question is not whether Nicodemus was saved. The most pressing question is whether you have been born again.
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Discussion Questions

Understanding the Context

1. The Pharisees began as preservers of Jewish culture and faith but eventually became known for hyper-legalism, judgmentalism, and resistance to God's fresh movements. How do you see similar patterns develop in churches or religious communities today? What is the warning for us in that history?
2. Pastor Joel noted that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, possibly because he had much to lose if he was seen. What were some moments in your own life where having genuine faith in Christ meant losing other things?

The New Birth

1. Jesus used the image of wind to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. You cannot see where it comes from or where it goes, but you see and feel its effects. What does this

teach us? Have you experienced this in your own conversion or in watching someone else come to faith?

2. Pastor Joel drew a clear distinction between intellectual faith and saving faith, using the image of skydiving. In your own words, how would you describe the difference between knowing facts about Jesus and truly trusting him?

The Gospel Jesus Preached

1. John 3:17 tells us that God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. Pastor Joel described this as a rescue mission, not the Love Boat. How does that image shape the way you think about the purpose of the church and your own role in it?
2. John 3:19-21 describes condemnation as loving darkness rather than coming to the light. What are some of the ways people avoid the light today, even people who consider themselves religious? What makes it so difficult for people to come honestly before God with their sin?
3. How does a person know the difference between genuine conversion and false assurance? What markers or evidences would you point to?

Personal Reflection

1. The sermon closed with the question: Are you born again? Not as a formality, but as a genuine point of reflection. How would you answer that question for yourself, and what is your answer based on?
2. Pastor Joel expressed hope that Nicodemus will be in heaven based on his later defense of Jesus before the council and his costly act of bringing burial spices. What does Nicodemus's progression suggest about how God works in a person's life over time? How does that encourage you in your own journey or in praying for others?

Practical Applications

For Those Who Are Certain of Their Faith Take time this week to write out your testimony of how you came to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

For Those Who Are Unsure Do not leave that uncertainty unaddressed. Speak privately with your group leader or pastor this week. Bring your honest questions and doubts into the open. The gospel is not fragile. It can handle your questions, and the people around you want to walk through this with you.

For the Whole Group Identify one person in your life who, like Nicodemus, is religious, moral, and respectable but may never have been born again. Commit to praying for that person by name every day this week and ask God to open a door for a gospel conversation.

Closing Prayer Focus

1. Close your time together by praying as a group. Be sensitive to topics that came up during discussion.